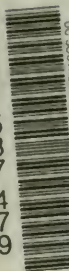


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PROVOCATIONS

BY L. BRISTOWE

INTRODUCTION BY G. K. CHESTERTON



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PROVOCATIONS

TO THE MEMORY

OF

MY FATHER

JOHN SYER BRISTOWE, M.D., F.R.S., LL.D.

THIS LITTLE BOOK

OF VERSE

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

PROVOCATIONS

BY
SIBYL BRISTOWE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
G. K. CHESTERTON

LONDON, W.C. 1
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INTRODUCTION

THE verses in this volume cover very many and various occasions ; and are therefore the very contrary of what is commonly called occasional verse. The term is used with a meaning that is very mutable ; or with a meaning that has been greatly distorted and degraded. Occasion should mean opportunity ; and in the case of poetry it should rather mean provocation. And the trick of writing upon what are called public occasions, instead of upon what may truly be described as private provocations, has been responsible for much verse which is not only insufficient but insincere. It has produced not only many bad poems ; but what is perhaps worse, many bad poems from many good poets. The sincerity of Miss Sibyl Bristowe's poetry is perhaps most clearly proved by the number of points at which it touches life ; and the spontaneity, or even suddenness, with which they are touched. It is an occasional verse which arises out of real occasions, and not out of merely fictitious or even merely formal ones. Thus while the one or two poems on the great war are probably the best, they are by no means the biggest ; they are not the most arresting in the sense of being the most ambitious. They are arresting because the great war really is great, and moves an imaginative spirit to great issues ; it is public but it is very far from being official. The war, indeed, is neces-

INTRODUCTION

sarily more important as a private event even than as a public event. And the few but fine lines, on a brother fallen in a fight amid wild river that sundered man from man, is a model of the manner in which such mighty events take their place among the impressions of the more sincere and spontaneous type of talent. The topic takes its pre-eminence by intensity and not by space, or even in a sense by design. Indeed it is best expressed in a metaphor used by the writer herself about the topic itself ; the metaphor of the colour red in its relation to other colours. Red rivets the eye, not by quantity but by quality ; and in any picture or pattern a spot or streak of it will make itself the feature or the key. Miss Sibyl Bristowe's poem conceives the Creator confronted as with a broken spectrum or a gap in coloured glass ; feeling the whole range of vision to be dim and impoverished and adding, by the authority of His own mysterious art, the dreadful colour of martyrdom.

Indeed the point of the comparison might very well be conveyed by the two poems about a London garden ; that on the garden in peace being comparatively long, and that about the garden in war exceedingly short ; short but sharply pathetic with its notion of peering and probing for the microscope flowers that must be a part of the most utilitarian vegetables. Indeed the short poems are certainly the most successful ; and there is the same brevity in the last line of the poem about the tragic passage of time ; " If lips of children had not told me so." The same general impression, as in the comparison already noted, is conveyed, for instance, in

INTRODUCTION

the fact that the poems about South Africa are private rather than public poems ; are in that sense, if the phrase be properly comprehended, rather colonial than imperial. That is, they are individual glimpses of great torrid wastes, like similar individual glimpses of quiet northern woods ; visions of crude and golden cities as personal as the parallel visions of normal northern cottages. Miss Sibyl Bristowe is perhaps an amateur, in the sense in which this is generally true of one who happens to be an artist in another art ; but it is unfortunate that the world has so much missed the notion of that natural ardour that should belong to the word.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

The author has to acknowledge the courtesy of the Editors of "The Poetry Review" and "The Johannesburg Star" for permission to include poems that have appeared in their pages.

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The Great War

INTO His colour store God dipped His hand
And drew it forth
Full of strange hues forgotten, contraband
Of War and Wrath.

Time wove the pattern of the years, that so
The quick and dead
Might knit their bleeding crosses in. And lo !
A patch of red !

My London Garden, 1914

MY Garden is a tiny square
Of bordered green
And gravel brown
In misty town,
And chimneys smoky and unclean
Sweep to the sky.—*You* would not care
To visit there.

The Grass creeps up all in between the stones
And raises undisturbed its luscious green
And laughs for youth in shrill and ringing tones.
I love it that it grows up so serene,
Dauntless and bright
And laughing me to scorn,
So vivid and so slight,
Glad for the night-shed dew and smoke-bred morn.

My little patch of bordered green and brown
Sleeps in the bosom of a grim old town,
I wish that you could see
Its beauty here with me ;
I'd tell you many things you never knew,
For few, so few
Know the romance of such a London strip,
With ferny screen
That slants shy gleams of sunlight in between

MY LONDON GARDEN, 1914

And weeds which flourish just inside the dip,
Holding their tenure with a firm deep grip
Where prouder things all die.

Small wonder I

Tend my tall weed as tho' it were a gem,
Note every leaf, and watch the stalwart stem
Wax strong and high—
My weed plot lives in reckless luxury.

But, in the Spring, before black grime
Has done its worst,
And cruel Time
And dust accursed
Have marred the innocence of each young leaf,
Or soiled the blossoms, like a wanton thief—
Masses of tulips, pink and white,
Rise from the earth in prim delight,
And iris, king of pomp and state,
In vesture fine
And purple and pale gold
Its buds unfold—
A mighty potentate,
And marshals nobly, proudly into line,
Whilst lilacs sway in wind and rushing breeze,
Bowing and nodding to some poplar trees.

But stay !—

You would not care

To visit there

Midst such surroundings grey.

My Garden's but an oasis of hope

Set in the frown

MY LONDON GARDEN, 1914

And dismal grandeur of a grim old town,
A semblance merely of the lawns *you* see ;
A hint, an echo of the things that be !
But he or she would be a misanthrope
Who would not share my garden hope with me.

My Garden, 1918

SUCH was my garden once, a Springtide hope of
flowers,

All rosy pink or violet or blue

Or yellow gold, with sunflecks on the dew.

Now in their place a Summer garden towers

Of green-leaved artichokes and turnip tops,

Of peas and parsnips, sundry useful crops.

—But even vegetables must have *little* flowers.

Over the Top !

*T*EN more minutes ! Say yer prayers,
Read yer Bibles,—pass the rum !
Ten more minutes ! Strike me dumb,
'Ow they creeps on unawares
Those blooming minutes. *Nine*. It's queer,
I'm sorter stunned. It ain't with fear !

Eight. It's like as if a frog
Waddled round in your inside
Cold as ice-blocks, straddled wide,
Tired o' waiting.—Where's the grog ?
Seven. I'll play you pitch and toss.
Six. I wins, and tails your loss.

'Nother minute sprinted by
'Fore I knowed it ; only *four*
(Break 'em into seconds) more
'Twixt us and Eternity !
Every word I've ever said
Seems a-shouting in my head !

Three. Larst night a little star
Fairly shook up in the sky,
Frightened by the lullaby
Rattled by the dogs of war.
Funny thing—that star all white
Saw old Blighty too, larst night !

OVER THE TOP !

Two. I ain't ashamed o' prayers,
They're only wishes sent ter God,
Bits o' plants from bloody sod
Trailing up His golden stairs.

Ninety seconds. Well, who cares !—

One.
.

No pipe, no blare, no drum—
Over the Top !—to Kingdom Come

To His Dear Memory

(April 14th, 1917)

BENEATH the humid skies
Where green birds wing, and heavy burgeoned trees
Sway in the fevered breeze,
My Brother lies.

And rivers passionate*
Tore through the mountain passes, swept the plains,
O'erbrimmed with tears, o'erbrimmed with summer rains,
All wild, all desolate.
Whilst the deep Mother-breast
Of drowsy-lidded Nature, drunk with dreams,
Below Pangani, by Rufigi streams,
Took him to rest.

Beneath the sunlit skies,
Where bright birds wing, and rich luxuriant trees
Sway in the fevered breeze,
My Brother lies.

The bending grasses woo
His hurried grave ; a cross of oak to show
The drifting winds, a Soldier sleeps below.
—Our Saviour's cross, I know,
Was wooden, too.

* The river Rufigi rose so high the night he died, none of his own Battalion could cross it to attend his last honours.

Sorrow

SEND Sorrow away,
For Sorrow is dressed in grey,
And her eyes are dim
With a weary rim.
Send Sorrow away.

Send Sorrow away.
Maid of the sombre sway,
Breathing woe
In a murmur low,
And her lips are pale
And her body frail.
Send Sorrow away.

Send Sorrow away,
Foe of the dancing day.
Oh ! her cheeks fall in,
And her hands are thin,
But her grip is fast
On the changeless past ;
And they sere and clutch
The soul they touch.
Send Sorrow away.

SORROW

Send Sorrow away,
For she haunts me night and day.
And Sorrow is dressed in grey,
Yes, Sorrow is dressed in grey.
And she looks so old,
So drawn, so cold—
Send Sorrow away.

Alas !

SO softly Time trod with me, that I lost
His footsteps pacing mine. I stayed the while
To wrest the luscious fruits from love and life ;
He strode on pauselessly, with thin cold smile.

So surely Time trod with me ; marred my bloom,
Stole all my roses, spread his cobwebs grey,
Wrung all my tresses in his silvering hand ;
So stealthily he lured my youth away
I only learned that I was old—to-day.

I could have borne it bravely, this I know,
Had not the lips of children told me so.

A Sacrament

TEARS !—And I brought them to the Lord, and said :
“ What are these crystal globes by nations shed ?

What is the crimson flood that stains the land ?
Where is Thy peace, and where Thy guiding hand ?

Why are those thousands daily sacrificed ?
Where is Thy might, and where the love of Christ ? ”

And from the heavens methought I heard a voice—
“ Oh son of earth, I bid thee still rejoice !

Those crystal tears by men and nations shed
Water My harvest, sanctify My dead.

That crimson flood which stains the hapless earth
Is but the prelude to a nobler birth.

Those thousands, who for home have gladly died,
Sleep in the hope of Jesus crucified.

Flesh, Blood, and Water, Little Child of Mine,
Veil in their depths a Mystery divine.”

I bowed my head, and prayed for faith to see
The inner visions of Calamity !

The Love-shed Tear

KNOCKED a man at the shining Gate,
 Hard and bad and proud and old !
 Deep in years—for his call was late.
 The Gate was shut, and he had to wait,
 And he leaned awhile on his bag of gold.

Roll'd the Heavenly portals back,
 Guarded close by a flaming sword !
 The old man opened out his sack,
 Saint Peter searched the sordid pack,
 " Is this thy passport to the Lord ? "

Saint Peter sighed, ill-gotten greed
 Was all therein to offer God,
 He vainly sought one kindly deed,
 One gentle word to those in need,
 One little step in mercy trod.

" And is this all ? " Saint Peter said,
 " This fruitless hoard of worthless sin,
 This earthly gold, which weighs like lead ?
 Oh, wretched man ! thy soul is *dead* !
 Thou mayst—thou canst not enter in !

THE LOVE-SHED TEAR

" Could I have found one single sign
Of life within thy sordid soul,
One kindling spark of Life Divine,
The flames of hell had not been thine.
Hence"—and he seal'd the Judgment scroll.

Down to the fires whose lurid light
Lick'd and blazoned the depths of hell,
Mocking red in the pitchy night,
Down, ever down, from out God's sight,
Down to the damned the Miser fell.

There in the haunts of deepest sin
Satan watched with his sombre eye.
The trembling Miser peered within,
He thought to find his kith and kin
Whose guilt condemned them too—to die.

He wandered round from place to place,
Then beat his breast with wondering moan,
For lo ! of all the human race
The Miser stood in hell—Alone !
For all had found some saving grace
That set them free to seek God's face
And could their vilest sins atone.

He cowered low in abject fear,
No single virtue could he plead,
Satan's own—by self decreed !
When sudden ! 'neath a dastard deed,
The devil cried, " What lieth here ? "
It was a single love-shed tear
Shed in an hour of direst need.

THE LOVE-SHED TEAR

Once he had wept in grief and pain,
Once—when his child lay coldly dead,
Once he had prayed. No prayer is vain.
This prayer had lived to save again
And bring remission on his head.

Only a tear ! The Heavenly Choir
Praised the Lord for the thing call'd love ;
But Satan shrieked in frenzied ire,
“ This foolish tear will quench my fire,
This man must go above—above ! ”

Back again where the flaming sword
Closely guarded the jewelled door.
“ I seek,” he humbly sobbed, “ our Lord.
I brought Thee gold—a worthless hoard—
Thou wouldst not let me in before.

“ But now I come to Thee with this—
A little thing, 'tis very small—
I pray Thee take it not amiss,
My gold is in the dark abyss,
This little tear, oh Lord, is all ! ”

“ Oh wondrous drop,” Saint Peter cried,
“ That shows the sap of life within
A *living* Soul, with chance to win
A place with God, immune from sin :
Methought the fount of Life had dried ”
(He flung the Gates of Heaven wide),
“ Go, *living* Soul, and enter in ! ”

THE LOVE-SHED TEAR

There in the lowest halls of grace,
Through deep remorse and pains austere
He washed his soul from sin's dark trace,
Then in his heart-felt awe and fear
He lowly sought his Saviour's face,
Saved to life through a love-shed tear !

Madonna Granduca and Child

LITTLE Christ, little Christ,
Sheltered there on Mary's breast,
All Thy child-like purity
Lightens life's obscurity,
So I thank Thee
For that ray of light confessed.

Sweet Thy mother, Baby Christ,
Sweet in woman's modesty ;
But to such an one as me
I would choose to kneel to Thee,
To Thy young simplicity,
To Thy full divinity,
Little Christ.

Give me tears to keep me clean,
Give me joyfulness serene,
Steep me for futurity
In Thy white-souled purity.
For Thine innocence sufficed,
Little Christ, little Christ,
Vagrants like myself to bless,
So I thank Thee
For Thy perfect holiness,
Little Christ.

A Vision of a Day that is Past

THE sky hung smooth o'er the line of hill
That shadowed the valley that seemed so still,
And the blackbird whistled his love notes shrill.

The church lay dreaming of God, and when
The bodies should rise from her graveyard pen
Where the high grass covered her poor dead men.

The water meadows shone rich with gold,
Gold that the buttercups had sold
To the nibbling sheep of the red ring-fold.

And even the river murmured rest
As the sun sank low in the tender west,
And the earth flowers slept on their mother's breast.

Over the valley that seemed so still,
Where the blackbird whistled his love-notes shrill
I gazed, and all against my will
I saw a vision beneath the hill.

Centuries passed like a mist away
And I stood in the glare of a burning day
Whilst the church-bells clamoured a call to pray.

A VISION OF A DAY THAT IS PAST

War and its brother raced hand in hand,
That brother called Death ; and they seared the land
With their fiery breath and the murder brand.

And copses and dales were bleeding red,
Naught was sacred, the living or dead,
The old, old man, or the girl just wed.

Men stormed the homestead, blazed the corn,
Pillaged and sacked from night till morn,
And spitted the babe that was newly born.

Savage and brutal, like hell-hounds freed,
They swarmed the hill, debauched with greed—
Some slunk behind, their lust to feed.

At last, when the streams ran human blood,
Soaking the fields in a scarlet flood,
A woman prayed with her child for food.

All on their way those soldiers passed
With a fœtid jest at her hapless fast,
And some men cut her down at last.

They cut her down ! Oh, woe is me,
And they left her to rot in her misery,
Naked and scorned for the world to see.

They left her bare in the cold night air,
Save only the comb in her coal-black hair,
And they strangled the baby, helpless there.

A VISION OF A DAY THAT IS PAST

They did not trouble to wind them round
In a sheet of earth in the dewy ground,
They looted them both for the spoil they found.

But the wind was kind. It wailed aloud
And churned the dust, till it rose a cloud
Like a pearly mist, to form a shroud.

And the leaves swooned down to the wind's sweet call
And covered the mother and babe and all,
Till they lay at peace in a soft green pall.

The church still ponders, and wonders when
Those bodies will rise from her graveyard pen,
But she knows they are blessed, those poor dead men,

For they sleep within her Christian fold
Under her consecrated mould,
Where a verse was read, and a prayer was told.

But under the hill, in the leaves somewhere,
Lie a mother and child all stark and bare,
Save only a comb in the coal-black hair—
Yet God will remember they lie out there.

Whilst digging up a hitherto uncultivated bit of garden near the Mendips, a gardener came across the mutilated skeletons of a woman and baby. A comb still decorated the woman's coal-black hair. At the inquest afterwards held upon the skeletons, it was suggested that the woman and her baby were probably refugees from the battle of Sedgemoor.

Bitterness Casteth Out Love

OVER the hill where the white road sweeps,
And the dead fern holds the snow,
Love flew by, and the black night sky
Shadowed the vales below.

Down in the creek, where the ice-pools gleam
And the trees stand gaunt and bare,
I crouched me down, and the sullen frown
Of earth entombed me there.

"Ah," mocked the ice-pool, hard and clear,
"Man with the frozen soul ;
Love sailed by, on a cloud-bound sky,
With the tears that sorrow stole."

"Gone," said the fern, "from your frost-bound touch ;
Gone from your winter's heart.
Love flew by, like the tattered sigh
Bitterness tore apart."

And the aching trees bowed branch and twig
And a shrivelled leaf made cry,
"If you are cold, and your heart be old,
For certain, Love must die."

Over the hill, where the white road sweeps,
And the dead fern holds the snow,
Sweet Love fled ; and a spirit dead
Spectres the slopes below.

The Hour of Happiness

THE world is fair ! The circling swell
Of fresh tumultuous sea
Holds life within its rhythmic rise
And bursts of harmony ;
And storm-clouds chasing down the sky
Empty their hearts as they sweep by.

The world is gay !—Such lilt and song,
Such mellowness of tune,
Such drifting airs from wave and shore,
From rock and sand and dune.
I did not know that clouds of spray
Splashed as they fell, a roundelay.

A magic day ! A magic hand
Has raised a magic mood.
Oh ! years ago God made the world
And saw that it was good.
And from His ecstasy divine
I borrowed this sweet hour of mine.

Thoughts

SO fair, so delicate the thoughts,
He marvelled they could be his own;
He did not dream that they were birds
From heaven flown.

Birds with a message in their throats,
Limpid and golden from the sky.
Most wonderful his song. 'Twas strange
He knew not why.

They fluttered their white wings awhile
Then soared again to paradise,
Leaving a trail of limpid notes
For sacrifice.

The Things Unsaid are the Things that Count !

YOU told me you had done with love,
You showed me why ;
You said it often, just to prove
Inconstancy !
I never heard—
I only marked—the *unsaid* word.

You told me you had thoughts beyond
My own poor love,
A wider sphere, ambitions fond !
'Fore God above
In rosy bliss
I only felt th' ungiven kiss !

I knew one day that unsaid word would dress
In shining letters, spelling happiness !
I knew that love would one day be mine own,
A tender suppliant for forgiveness won.
I had no fear,
Tho' cold and clear
You gave your answer,—sweet, my dear,
I never heard—your spoken word !

The Song of the Long Ago

WRAITH of the out-lived years,
Wandering too and fro,
Floating to earth on the hallowed tones
Of a song of long ago.

Shadows of those asleep
Steal through the simple lay,
Lifting the silvery veil aside
Of a long lost yesterday.

Beautiful silent days,
Raised from the silent past,
In the pregnant chords of a once loved song
Memory speaks at last.

Of the golden summer eves,
Shrined in the mists of years
And a world of hopes ! Dear God, what hopes,
Born to the soul in tears.

But the youthful hopes creep by,
Stealing with solemn chime
To a finite grave. They will rise in faith
When Eternity conquers Time.

THE SONG OF THE LONG AGO

Dream-laden, tender song,
Sacred and sweet and old,
With the lingering touch of a bygone age,
I have scanned again in thy down-turned page,
A tale that was long since told.

The Sinner's Dreaming

WHEN the great sun flung bands of gold
 (Bands to the number of seven)
On the limpid sea, we followed the gold
 And climbed on our way to Heaven.

There to the portals of cloud and storm,
 Piled high in the regions of thunder,
Till we reached the sky, in its columns of storm,
 And God's gates rolled asunder.

Below, the world like a ball of mist
 With us, pearl and jacinth and beryl,
And it faded away, that pearl-grey mist,
 And we clung to the gates in peril.

Myrrh and incense, and jacinth and pearl,
 How we cringed on the floor of Heaven !
And the great sun drew its bands from the pearl,
 Bands to the number of seven.

And now, as we gaze from our star-crowned sphere
 To the shadows, where earth is seeming,
We know that that hazy circling sphere
 Was only a sinner's dreaming !

Woman

WHEN God made woman
Fair He made her, as the rose ;
Her face upturned to catch His radiant smile ;
His sunbeams lurked the while
About her lips ; with care He chose
Her hair and glory, and her round white throat,
The pillared keeper of her woman's note.
God filled her eyes with innocence and love,
And glimpsing lights from out His skies above.
The Father knew that she was beautiful.
And yet, to make her nobly dutiful
To Him, within her breast
He set a shrine, all holy and possessed
In shining mystery. And few who know
To enter in. The evading flame aglow
That fills the shrine, is white as unshed snow.
And deep within that casket of her breast
Are secret joys, to God alone confessed.

Christmas

WHITE the weather, white the weather !
Stars and ice at one together,
Shining frost on cracking branches,
Snow in pale smooth avalanches.
White the weather, wintry weather.

Wan the way, where once the heather
Bloomed in radiant summer weather,
Sparkling icicles moon-lustred
Droop, where once the green leaves clustered.
Life is sleeping, held in tether.

Once a Babe was born this weather,
Three Wise Men set forth together ;
Once a Star of wondrous glory
Told the Christ's triumphant story.
Wintry weather !—God's own weather !
All the world washed white together !

February

I DO not sing for youth and love,
For passion and desire,
I only sing because the sun
Is gold like shining fire ;
I only sing because the day
Is blue, the grass is green,
The birds are singing out their hearts,
The waking twigs between !

Because the chestnut branch is tipped
With buds of folded brown,
Because the snowdrops look so white,
The catkins feather down,
Because the naked elms have bent
To whisper me this thing—
The sap is stirring in their limbs—
How can I choose, but sing !

Oh ! 'Tis May

COME and idle in the sun,
Come and idle, everyone,
Flowering May
Is wholly gay,
Come and idle in the sun.

Come and smell the new-mown lawn,
Fragrant grass, and dew-wet dawn.
Buds unfold,
And leaves grown bold
Spread great shadows on the lawn.

Come and hear the chaffinch trill,
Hear the lark and thrushes thrill !
Come along,
Such a song,
Such a chorus bright and shrill.

Won't you come ?
Hear the hum,
Hear the hum of tireless bee.
Come with me,
Wilt not idle for a day ?

OH! 'TIS MAY

Wilt not shirk
Thy waste of work?
This is life, this radiant play
Nature keeps for flowering May.
Buds and bees and grass and flower
Make a sweeter, holier hour
Than all drab years of labour dour.
Come away,
Come and play,
Come and glory in the sun,
Come and laugh! Come, everyone.

Flowering May
Is fresh and gay,
Come and greet the golden sun.
Come away,
Come and play,
Come, oh! come out, everyone!

To the Wind

WIND, wind,
Do you whisper eerie sonnets to the moon
As it rises white and sickled? Do you croon
Silver-coloured ditties pale and low
As you rock the cedar branches too and fro?
Do you sing to woo the bat,
Is it that, is it that?
Have you tunes for such a sullen little wraith,
Half dream, swooping high, scarcely seen, chiefly faith?
Would you hold a phantom to your breast
As you murmur gently love-notes from the west?

Wind, wind,
Every tree is but a harp for your desire,
Every leaf a mellow string to swell your choir,
Every grass a cooing reed
At your need, for your need,
Drums and clashing cymbals of the sea
Boom a pæan, hurl a flood of melody.

Wind, wind,
Men have snatched an air or two
Of a fantasy from you
And have prisoned them in books to make them stay,
Scattered fragments that your lips have blown this way.

TO THE WIND

Small and shy and thin and cramped and grave,
They are caged and tied to paper in a stave.
Do you mind,
Oh Wind?

But you laugh and troll out gaily on your way,
"Keep the fragments, little earth-men, dance and play,
'Tis a dainty roundelay,
Hold it, pray ; hold it, pray.
For myself, my breath is fierce, myself am great,
For you tiny fallen airs I dare not wait ;
Storms beneath my rushing wings unfurled
Roll the symphonies which dominate the world."

The Grey Wind

I HAVE been, where never man went,
With the grey wind :
Far from the gorse and the wet earth scent
I have been.

I have seen, what no man hath seen
With the grey wind :
I have cowered down his knee : between :
I have seen.

I have heard, what no man hath heard
With the grey wind :
The dry leaves crackle and snap at his word
I have heard.

I have heard, and I watched them fly
All the wild leaves
In a hustled crowd, to the stormy sky,
At his word.

And they swept in a whirlwind wan,
Churned by his breath,
Out to the windways, where never sun shone,
Forth they swept.

THE GREY WIND

Whiles they leapt in a maddened dance,
Swung scatterwise ;
Eddied and swirled to a swift advance
Till they crept

Spent and worn, in their frenzied fear,
Leaves of brown-gold
Chittering feebly in masses sere,
Crazed and slow :

And I know, what never man knew,
Those poor dead leaves
Are the souls of men the grey wind slew—
This I know.

Poeta Nascitur

Tho' all mayn't know it,
Rules only, never made a poet.

HE thought to shape his writings into verse,
He pruned them down to language fixed and terse,
But finding that would give his tricks no play,
Spurned his reserve, and tried another way.

This time he dressed the naked words with care,
Trimmed them with adjectives and adverbs fair,
And studying every law of form and rhyme,
Pieced up his metre into studious time.

But still, whatever medium he chose,
His work remained poor, tortured, unsexed prose.

One dew-drenched eve, whilst pondering in the vale
He felt the leaves a-quiver in the dale—
Stooping, he caught a whisper from the sky
That slipped from out the twilight whimsically.

Its tender sorrow touched him as it fell,
Quickened his fancies, stirred his heart as well,
In reverent awe he heard its mystic call,
A heaven-born glory permeating all.

POETA NASCITUR

He did not dare to pin that whisper down
To words so peacocked in a flaunting gown,
The forms of metre he had conned so well
Were all inadequate that sigh to tell.

No further use that artificial code,
Those simpered rhymes, his petty bandbox mode
Of tight-packed trumpery. No need to pace
The solemn pavements of the commonplace.

Each little trick, each fantasy of art
Were stones that blocked th' outpourings of his heart.
He looked beyond the great intrushing sea,
Seeing at last the hidden things that be !

And of the wave he learnt a cadence sweet,
Strong as its life, a lilt of rippling feet,
Whilst from the wind that swept the answering trees
He culled the moaning rhythm of the breeze.

He weaved that whisper of the twilight sky
Into a poem, soft with melody,
It thrilled the soul in motion strong and free,
Wild as the wave, a break of ecstasy.

It kissed the borderland 'twixt heaven and earth,
Sweet in its passion, holy in its mirth—
And lo ! a light gleamed through each noble line,
The wind crooned softly, starways seemed to shine—
That poem—was divine.

Queen Elizabeth

She would dance a Coranto, that the French Ambassador, hidden behind a curtain, might report her sprightliness to his master.—GREENE.

SO Elizabeth danced
And the guest was entranced
As she tripped the Coranto, and curtsyed and swayed
In a robe of rich stuff,
Jewelled slashings and ruff,
And a stomacher stiff, thick with pearlings and braid.
Ho ! he peeped round the curtain,
'Tis perfectly certain
Enraptured of mien
At the tiptoeing Queen,
In a courtly way, in a Frenchy way,
In a naughty way, in that Tudor day.

Yes, he peeped round the screen,
And he sniggered (" I ween,
This is only a woman to flatter and kiss,
A creature of vanity ")—" Madam, what bliss
To have witnessed such grace, such elegant—" here
He could find no more words, and emotion 'twas clear
Choked all further utterance,
For never had such a dance
Entered his thought.
Such slippers ! and ought
He to mention the hose ?
All of silk to suppose ?

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Had the muse from Olympus stepped down for a while
Terpsichore style?

Then quite without guile
He bowed very low in his Frenchified way,
In that courtly way, of a far-off day,
And the laugh of the lady was merry and gay.

And all throughout Europe the fame of her spread,
Her frivolous tricks, and the foreigners said
It was only a princess, a slave to her pride,
True child of a mother a king had decried!—
So she thwarted and twisted the world to her whim
As he misunderstood her—she outwitted him!

Now one day it arose that King Philip of Spain,
Incensed at her folly, essayed yet again

To bring her to reason

Just at his own season.

So he sent his Ambassador, Spanish Mendoza,
To this slippery Queen, with a message *sub rosa*.

“Nay, by mine honour,” she simpered. “How now,
Is it truce to my jest? ’Tis a pity I trow.

It were best to be merry!” She yawned very wide,
And the Spaniard furtively smiled at her side.

’Twas only a woman to flatter and kiss,

’Twould be easy to manage a creature like this!

Hard-headed and wise, sat the gaunt English Queen,
Her words were unyielding, her purse it was mean—

The Spanish Ambassador

Writhed like a matador!

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Beaten and wounded, he played to her vanity.
—It was tucked out of sight—and with Spanish profanity
He cursed all the Protestants under his breath,
And committed them gently to burnings and death ;
But never an inch did Elizabeth yield,
And the messenger saw that his mission was sealed,
 In that far-off day.
And Elizabeth laughed
 In a curious way
That was subtle with craft :
 “ Under favour, you may
Tell your master in Spain, that my country comes first.
I am England, and English, its best and its worst.
Tell him my subjects I love as my children,
Tell him they thirst but their mouths will be filled when
They meet him at sea.
Give that greeting from me.”

Back to Madrid went that Spanish Ambassador,
Broken and bruised like a bull-beaten matador,
 And he bowed very low
 (It was etiquette so)
And he cried, “ Oh, that Queen is the devil in sooth.
A fool, Sire, ’twas thought, for she danced so uncouth !
But her bargains are hard as her heart and her hand,
As her dreary dominions, her men and her land !
And never be gulled by her feminine vanity,
’Tis only a pose, all her vacant inanity !
Let us man an armada to crush her and raid her,
To send her to hell to the demons who made her ! ”

QUEEN ELIZABETH

And they came, as you know :
Heavy ships big and slow
In a lumbering way, in a blundering way
In that Tudor day.
Proudly up channel their galleons swept,
Swiftly our pinnaces hustled and leapt
At their rear. Dogs tracking their prey
And biting and snapping
And snarling and yapping,
Delighted and fierce at the chance of a fray.

God ! How the Spaniards fled in a panic
When our fire-ships had neared them,
And blazed them, and seared them,
Wrapping their hulks in red flamings Satanic !
God, how they scattered,
Slipped anchor, and shattered,
Sails tattered,
Masts battered,
Up to the north whilst a mighty sou'-wester
Rose wildly and strong, to hinder and pester
Their perilous flight ; how they foundered and sank
On that treacherous bank,
Lost, lost evermore
On our alien shore.

With their grim freight of death
And the poisonous breath
Of scurvy and pestilence, hunger, despair,
The struggling remainder of galleons bear
Them back to the port of Corunna again,
All, all that is left to the pride of proud Spain.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Courageous and calm, with the valour of men
Elizabeth waited the chances ; and then

“ My children are fed
And their enemies dead,”
Cried the frivolous Queen.

Majestic of mien
She towered, her wisdom and high inspiration,
The might of a people, the soul of a nation.

L'Envoie

(And even to-day I will wager that no man
Can fathom the mind or the depths of a woman !)

The Death of Queen Elizabeth

ONLY
So lonely,

Was ever woman quite so lonely ?
Clad in a rich bejewelled dress, unchanged
For nigh a week, her stiff ruff disarranged,
Her fierce eyes staring dully at the floor,
Fear on that face, which ne'er knew fear before—
Elizabeth.

Finger on lip she sits. Time has outgrown
That gorgeous England, which was once her own.
Those solemn courtiers pacing to and fro
Outside the palace, neither care nor know
The dying Queen is lonely !

Ha ! what was that ? Plotters within the gate ?
And she, contemptuous victim once of hate
And score of plots, plunges her naked sword
Thrice through the arras, which had never stirred—
Afraid !—*Elizabeth* ?

Huddled amidst the pillows, gaunt and old,
She shivers, this gay daughter of a gold
Entrancing age. The debonair gallant
Who sang her, now the mocking sycophant.

THE DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

The ministers she trusted, gone. The throne
She loved with all her passion, left for one
Of stock and seed she loathed. Mere English, she
Shrinks from the new and cold sobriety
Of chill advancing fashion. Only Death
To woo this poor—this great Elizabeth !
Was ever woman quite so lonely ?

The Plea of the Antarctic

The best people to judge are those who served under Captain Scott. Had we been in the same place as the victims we should have wished our bodies to remain at rest where we had given our best efforts in the cause we earnestly believed in.—COMMANDER EVANS.

OUT of the ice-bound realms a clear voice said,
“Give me the right to bury my great dead.
No green-girt lands can honour them as I,
Nor wrap them round in such pale purity.

“Leave them with me, alone in my white world,
Place England’s flag above their cairns unfurled.
I need great souls ! Great Hero souls to bless
And consecrate my snowy wilderness.”

The Stranger in London

'TIS a big, big place !—

And the clouds that gather the grey skies in
Are frayed by chimneys black and old,
Serried stacks of grime and sin.
And every road and every street
Has a secret tale to guard and hold,
Mid the echoing tones of passing feet.
Oh weary place !
Brimmed up with life, confused in sound,
I have little part in your daily round,
For I wander lonely—stranger bound.

There are houses surely which open their door
To those they know,
For me they stand in a formal row
Story on story, floor upon floor,
Shielding themselves from the crimson sun,
From the on-rolling mutter
Of traffic and wagon, of footstep and cry,
With curtain and shutter.
Mute houses which shun
All light, sound and me
Inexorably.

Sometimes when I toss on my pillow at night,
When the spluttering rain

THE STRANGER IN LONDON

Spreads the smuts on the pane,
I dream that those mansions relax their grim pride
And opening wide
Their intimate hearts to me,
Chill taciturnity
Melts in the warmth of rich colour and fire.
Vast halls are alight
With radiant desire
To show hospitality.
Lavish regality
Squanders the staircase in flowers and green.
And I wander unseen
Through the great pillared corridors, kiss the soft red
Of the shimmering hangings ; the sensuous glow
Ablaze in the hearth thrills me thoroughly, I know
There is place for me there, in those homes I thought dead.

But sleep's " Open, Sesame "
Fails with the light,
Forcing the hopes of me
Back into night.
Never to open, never to see
Stern cold houses
Closed to me !

Gathering storms which smirch the sky,
Burst your bonds, for up on high
May I come in ?
I have no part in this world, no home,
No love to hold me. Bid me come,
I would warm myself at your great round sun,

THE STRANGER IN LONDON

I would open your windows one by one.
Your little stars and your crescent moon.
I am tired and thin,
I think I shall come and see you soon.
May I come in, may I come in?

The Transvaal in June

UNDER the deep blue vault
Of a hot relentless sky,
Burns the hot red deep, and the hot red road,
And the choking dust like a rust corrode
Soars up in spirals high.

Under the sun-gilt span
Of a hot and brazen sky,
Cries the thirsty drift for a summer rain,
Baring its naked stones in vain
And its mud in misery.

Under the cloudless curve
Of a wide remorseless sky
Sleeps the patchy scrub of the sweeping veld
And the slim blue gums, and the wattle belt
Where the shrike broods watchfully.

Under the sullen glare
Of the grim unblinking sky
The hot dorp pants, the red roofs daze,
The mule tracks scorch, the iron-stones blaze
In their sun-struck agony.

Johannesburg

MIRACULOUS city !
Thoughts stupendous to crush the wise,
Buildings monstrous which brush the skies !
Raise your eyes
In awe. Yet pity
This marvellous, golden, mushroom city.

Hear the roar !
Like the moan of the sea, when the wave curls back
From the granite rock which whirls it back,
A great unceasingly grinding drone
In a heavy unyielding monotone.
'Tis the frenzied wail of the lost in pain,
The shriek of the damnèd raised in vain,
Again ! again !
And the stamping machine with a brutal joy
Wrenches the gold from its quartz alloy,
Crushing the tortured stone to dust
As it yields the ore
To the vast unquenchable thirst for lust.

Feel the south wind !
As it sweeps the veld with its icy breath,
Biting the scrub with its teeth of death,
Lifting the dust like a phantom shroud
From the tailing heaps, in a veil of cloud.

JOHANNESBURG

Scattering the belching smoke, which flies
From the chimney line that marks the rise
Of the Main Reef ridge.
Some devil's bridge
To bind the town to the broad full plain
Which rolls beyond, like the boundless main.

Precocious town !
The forward child of a youthful state
So young in years. So rich, so great
In gilt renown,
And glittering fate !
Oh ! ponder deep, all ye ! Yet pity
This marvellous, golden, old-young city !

In the Land of the Silences

SHE stood before the tent, a winging tent
In thicknesses of canvas, taut and strong,
Burning beneath a sun unreticent,
Raised upon planks, and lashed with rope and thong.
And she was fair, a sprig of English May,
Born for the kiss of merriment and day.

Wide from the tent, like swell on swell of sea
The great veld swept and rolled in curves away,
A shabby patch of God's eternity
Neglected by the angels, bare and grey,
Wind-swept and solitary. Dick and she
Had made this veld their home for seasons three.

Well she remembered that first reckless ride,
Their wedding journey over spruit and land,
The barbed-wire straggling snares, the kopje side,
The crumbling blockhouse dreaming of command,
Holding a loot of empty pot and tin,
Which once had held a soldier guard within.

The mud-clogged drift, the dust all baked and red
Twisting in spiral devils, raw as rust,
Those lonely crosses leaning on their dead,
Murmuring Africa was never just.

"She knows no pity," shrieked the fierce South wind,
"She steals your youth and stultifies your mind."

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

On, on they flew, past Kaffir boom and kraal,
Thorn wacht-een-beetje, fleshy aloe clump,
Through the charred stretches of the high Transvaal,
By meerkat hole, and rounded white-ant hump
Of tunnelled earth. She laughed ; the air was wild,
Strong with exhilaration, undefiled.

At last they reined. Across the scrub and veld
Dick pointed with his sjambok to the white
Outspreading tent, then to the wattle belt
That marshalled thinly in the shimmering light.
“ There lies our home, dear love, for you and me.”
She looked up gladly, smiled him tenderly.

Summer had followed winter, radiant, rich,
Reckless with life, extravagant in bloom,
Mad for the first wild draught of water, which
Burst from the thunder-clouds, whose massive gloom
Blackened the skies, then splitting, ripped and tore
Deep gorges through the tracks, with deafening roar.

The storms swept by. A fairyland of green
Mantled the waking plains ; wide star-like flowers
Sprang to their feet ; the streams ran strong and clean,
The soft mimosa sprinkled into showers
Of golden balls. The oleander hedge
Swayed to the line of gums with leaves on edge.

And it was summer now. Beth crossed the slood,
Grown arrogant with rains, which lapped her square
Of gorgeous garden, swirling to the spruit
Beyond, in childish hurry. Was he there ?

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

She scanned the far horizon. No, no sign—
Of man or beast to break the distance line.

Stay, was that he beyond the drift? Ah no,
Only her wishes trembling in the air
And mirage heat. A train sedate and slow
Wheeled round the kopje far away. The glare
Of brazen sun beat in her eyes. Too late!—
He would not come to-night! In lonely state

She must endure these o'ercharged dragging hours,
This th' unspoken horror of her life,
The dread that sapped her strength, and drained her powers,
The guarded secret of a brave man's wife!
Dick would come back to-morrow with the light
Of morn. But fear would be her Lord to-night.

Beth turned her to the stoep. With sensuous breath
The moonflower drenched the garden in its scent,
Ardent, voluptuous, and white as death
It hung long blossoms, heavy with intent.
The morning glories folded into sleep.
Lay purple in undress, and slumber deep.

Behind the wattles rose the circled moon,
Splashing her silver over poort and track.
The boys went chattering to their kraals, and soon
Long shadows ribbed the tent in white and black.
Beth closed the entrance fast, then slowly sped,
A lonely woman, to a lonely bed.

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Come away,
Come away,
Come, come, come away,
For the moon,
For the moon
Wove a shroud in the day,
All of white,
All of white,
Which she flings over all
In the night,
In the night
Like a pall,
In the night, in the night.

Come away,
Come away,
Come, come, come away,
For the moon,
For the moon
Threw my blossoms a ray,
They are white,
Deadly white,
And their petals are pale,
Wan and light.
Do not fail,
Come away—in the night.

Come away,
Come away,
Come, come, come away,
For the moon,
For the moon

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Wove a shroud in the day,
And my scent,
Oh my scent
Which I waft over all,
Is of death !
Feel its breath !
And the moon made a pall
Which she lent to us all,
To us all !
Come away. . . . Come away,
Come,
Come,
Come. . . .

" Come, come ! "—The sleeper moved. An argent shroud
Woven with silver cross-stitch into stars.
Was that the moonflower singing from the cloud ?
Why were its petals bruised and veined with scars ?
" Come ! "—It was not the moonflower. Wide awake
Beth started up. That voice !—For pity's sake !

That dear loved voice. The midnight echoed clear,
Rang with that urgent summons from the veld,
That startling premonition. Far and near
Cries shivered through her brain. Dick's voice. She felt
It vibrant in her ears. A call, for her.
She sprang up quickly, every sense astir.

Down past the shadowed garden, through the kloof,
She knew the way, she followed to the cry.
No stealthy footpad, sound of howl or hoof
Could scare her in the awful mystery

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Of God-begotten knowledge. Dick had called,
Terrestrial things nor checked her, nor appalled.

"This is the shroud," she murmured. Over all
The moon had spread her splendour, cold and white.
"This is the shining drapery, the pall,
This hoary sheet of clean pellucid light."

Grasping a small revolver in her hand
She hurried on, across the broken land.

A mighty Silence wrapped the veld in dreams.
The breath of night hung in the soundless air.
A wilderness unknown, unconquered streams
Lay with the Universe, at one, to dare
In majesty of nature, undisturbed
The flux of centuries, untrod, uncurbed.

The white world grew before her. Silhouettes
Of shadowed kopjes struck against the sky.
The vlei gleamed fitfully. With sharp-edged frets
The coarse grass cut the horizon lustily.
The dancing moonway on the swollen drift
Broke into patterns on the current swift.

Thwarted. Beth stared in piteous dismay.
A frantic river, wild with recent rains,
Largened beyond all daring, barred her way.
Flooding the plains, drunk with illicit gains
It dashed with savage fury, tossing high
Its waters over bank and boundary.

The girl looked anxiously around. Below
The river widened, shallowing its bed,

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Seeming to flow on leisurely and slow.
Above, it narrowed to a ravine, fed
By the Fountains. Three bald-headed rocks
Stood solemnly midstream on thick-set hocks.

Straightly she turned towards the upper reach.
The portly rocks as old and grey as time
Offered a bridge. On past the sunken beach
Of unclean ooze, the sea of gathered slime,
Across the hunching boulders, where the course
Of huddled waters broke their angry force.

Climbing from rock to rock, from crest to crest,
She threw her weight upon the further bank
Into a clod of mud, whose squelching breast
Received her greedily. She seized the rank
Wild clumps of herbage with her hands, then strove
Until she reached the trusty ridge above.

Over the drift ! The whisperings of her soul
Soothed every hindrance to a thing of naught.
The billowing veld, its tawny ceaseless roll
Was but the highway to the end she sought.
Love was her pilot, and by love controlled
Its radiance led her, like the Star of old.

Far to the east a straggling knot of trees
Hinted a farm was nestling in their rear,
The scent of flowers floated on the breeze,
The cattle in their kraals, in safety near
Drowsed in the heavy slumber hours of night.
But to the west she hurried, in her flight.

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

On, on past trackless scrub, where all around
Like shapeless monsters bulging heap on heap,
Crouched the vast ant heaps on the virgin ground.
And winding in and out them, pressed and deep,
Two wheel spoors scarred the earth. She traced the curve
The cart had chiselled in a sudden swerve.

With feverish haste she followed line on line
Each deep-hewn rut that carved itself in sand.
Here by the grace of heaven was a sign,
A way to realise her dream's command,
Her instinct's prophecy. God ! what was that ?
Rending the Silences with tear and scrat.

Again ! That shot ! Then all the world lay still,
Calm in the deep placidity of strength
That recks for nothing human. Passive till
Man desecrates its hallowed peace at length.
But to that sound she fled. For Dick lay west,
His wide eyes staring, blood upon his breast.

Dead, with his face against the cart-wheel. Dead.
A scarlet river flowing, flowing—oh !
His lips were red, his hands—the plains were red !
She knelt beside him, spoke him loudly so
He needs must hear. She bound his wounds in vain,
That nerveless heap would never speak again.

Dawn came at last. No need to wail or cry,
Dick was beyond all help, and none would hear.
She clasped him in her full-souled agony,
Feeling the young gold morning, fresh and clear,

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Yet seeing nothing. Stunned to outward things,
She only knew the dullness sorrow brings.

And in her numbness heeded not the red
Tall grasses swaying as they bowed and bent
Beneath a crawling Kaffir, or his head
Rear up, a cringing caterpillar sent
To rob the great white Baas ; for plenty slow
Some white men take to die, as black men know.

But if the Baas were dead, beyond all doubt
Slink could be brave. His belly clave the ground.
Had anybody heard the white man's shout,
Caught by the kopjes, echoed in rebound ?
Ach ! how he wriggled ! Now the cart was Slink's,
The scoff, the silver watch, the fiery drinks.

And look, the mules outspanned were plenty good,
So was the stolen gun. He reached the pool
Of crimson where the two-wheeled Cape-cart stood.
He slithered nearer, wet in dewdrops cool,
His rough patched trousers soaked, then sneaking round
Peeped from his vantage to the bleeding ground.

Spooks !—His eyes bulged, down dropped his brutal jaw.
Rooted to where he clung, a-sweat with fright,
The cramps of terror gripping at his maw.
Spooks !—Pallid spooks ! He shrieked away the sight
Till the wide veld was reeling. Blurred and pale
A spook arose, to follow on his trail.

It glided nearer, nearer—nearer yet,
Tall as the English mysi far away !

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

His tongue stuck in his throat, and bleeding wet
He saw the master sitting up at bay !
 He heard his name, he heard the still air crack,
 Then dropped astonished, wondering, on his back,

Till every spook had vanished. Slink had gone
To make a longer trek, where plains were dim.
And haggard-eyed and worn, stern vengeance done,
Beth huddled by the poor stiff clay of him
 She loved, the smoking weapon in her hand
 To scare the scavenger of carrion brand.

The hours crawled by. Soaked through with thunder rains
She kept her vigil, loosening her hair
In shining masses o'er him. Wild refrains
Of piteous croonings and of vague despair
 Crept to her lips, then died away, unsung,
 Hiding their tunes, her shattered dreams among.

Jan Rissik trekked him homeward. Half a day
To Cellier's farmstead more. The patient team
Of oxen, plodding slowly on their way,
Bent to the nekstrop. Huick ! a thin sharp gleam
 Of curling whip flicked at the leader, clean,
 Sure as a rapier thrust, and long and lean.

The voorlooper strode on ahead. The boys
Marched to the rhythm of a sing-song chaunt
To ease their work. The wagon's lumbering noise,
The cheering of the oxen, stormed the haunt
 Of nature. 'Neath the awning, broad and square
 Sat Rissik's vrouw, worn with maternal care.

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

Her children nestled round her. Two hours yet !
The Dutchman whistled as he jogged along
In leisured haste. He licked his thick lips wet
To loose his tune. A heavy winging throng
Of gorging vultures, black as devil's brood,
Rose swearing on the air, with protests crude.

Some rotting beast ! Jan Rissik raised his eyes
To watch the swart aasvogel * in their flight,
Cracking his whip to dissipate the flies
That swarmed in thousands. Pestilential ! Right
Where his oxen wended, straight in front !
He clambered from his seat with angry grunt,

And pious prayer politely blended, sure
The Powers above would note the quoted text,
Nor heed the fact that while he prayed, he swore !
His keen eyes swept the veld, grave and perplexed.
Two mules strayed fettered by the reim, outspanned,
A cart unhitched, stuck in the khaki sand.

Jan pulled his slouch hat down, and stroked his beard.
The harsh birds croaked, the dingy clotted brown
That stained the earth confirmed the tale he feared.
A woman in the burning dust stooped down
Over a crumpled figure ; and a sheen
Of golden tresses veiled it, like a screen.

She rocked her too and fro, a little breath
That might be song, or might be strangled word
Broke from her now and then ; but only death
Lay in her arms and answered not, nor heard.

Aasvogel—vultures.

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

“ Come away, come away,
Come, come, come away,
For the moon, for the moon
Made a shroud in the day.
Come away, come away, come, *come*, the moon,
The flowers are calling, Dick—my love, come soon.”

Some hundred yards—Pah ! Jan felt strangely sick—
She must have dragged that fearful thing away,
The devil's brood had claimed. The Rooinek
Was safe. Heaven knew how desperate the fray !
The fierce shot spent, the havoc, showed too well
Her awful battle with those fiends from hell.

He spoke her in the Taal ; he touched her hand ;
She scarcely moved, but with a tear-stained smile
Babbled in words he could not understand,
Nodding her head towards the plains the while.
“ The other one is dead. He was so black.
He killed my husband, so I killed him back.

“ I want to lay the moonflowers on Dick's breast,
They told me he was calling, so I came ;
They kept on nodding, nodding to the west,
I want to have those moonflowers, the same
That told me. Dick is dead. So cold and dead
I don't remember all the flowers said.

“ But if we are not very quick, the shroud
Of silver cross-stitch, woven star on star,
Will be quite stolen by the thunder-cloud,
It's creeping, creeping, growling from afar.”

IN THE LAND OF THE SILENCES

“Ja, Ja,” the old Boer nodded. “Both are dead.”

“One must be buried ! ” so the good vrouw said.

They laboured hard to dig the white man's bed,
Jan Rissik and his trusty man and boys,
Then laid him gently down. With prayer unsaid
But beating at her throat, no word that cloy
Or mars itself in speech—Beth flung the sod
Over her love—and left him there—with God.

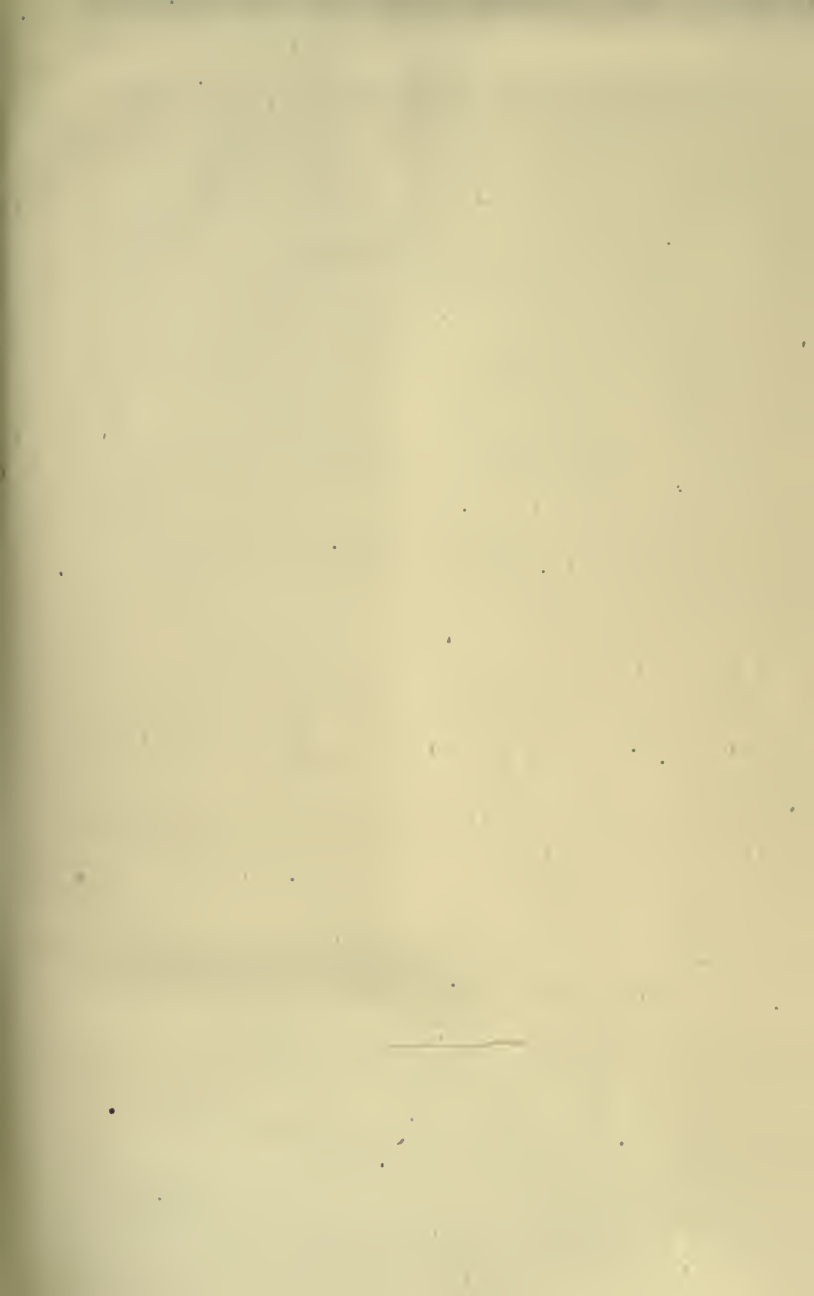
Only a dusty mound to mark his grave,
A dream out-dreamed, a tiny buried cross
From off her neck. The Lord had called, who gave
His rich Acceptance that the world deems loss !
Father, forgive us ! For our eyes that see
Only our sorrows—when we should see Thee !

.

To Cellier's farm Jan Rissik trekked at morn.
The English girl lay sleeping in his cart
Clasped to the Dutch vrouw's breast. No longer torn
By grief and passion, human fears, her heart
Was now at rest ; her Christ-soul lulled to peace,
Her hands outstretched, to meet the Great Release.

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